New Beginnings

Building on traditions with new improvements at Como Park Zoo and Conservatory.

inside

A Facelift for Como Zoo’s African Hoofstock Building

Coming Soon: A Centennial Garden for the Marjorie McNeely Conservatory
Inside this issue

Coming Soon: ZooBoo 2014
Match Your Membership Dollars!
Como Friends Profile: Sherry Fonseth-Lais

Como News and Events

Face to Fur: A fresh facelift for the African Hoofstock Building will allow visitors to get closer to Como Zoo’s gentle giants

Face to Fur

Roots Revival: Como’s turn-of-the-century outdoor gardens are the inspiration behind the Centennial Garden setting down roots this summer

Roots Revival

Make the most of Minnesota’s growing season with a fresh crop of tools, guidebooks and garden accessories at Garden Safari Gifts

Garden Safari Gifts

Tour the tropical rainforests and world heritage sites of Panama with the Como Friends Travel Program

Travel with Como Friends

Como Park Zoo and Conservatory is accredited by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA). Look for the AZA logo whenever you visit a zoo or aquarium as your assurance that you are supporting a facility dedicated to providing excellent care for animals, a great experience for you, and a better future for all living things.

How to reach us
24-hour information: 651-487-8200
Visitor Services: 651-487-8201
Education Department: 651-487-8272
Garden Safari Gifts: 651-487-8222
Membership & Donations: 651-487-8229
Rentals: 651-487-8250
Volunteer Services: 651-487-8252
Director of Parks and Recreation: Mike Hahm

Como Insider
Graphic Design: Matt Wehner
Editor: Laura Billings Coleman
The Como Insider is printed by Dolan Printing on Recycled paper.

The American Association of Botanical Gardens and Arboreta (APGA) serves and strengthens public gardens throughout North America by supporting and promoting their work, value and achievements in horticultural display, education, research and plant conservation.

You’ve seen Como from the Tilt-a-Whirl and the Tornado—now see it from the treeline! Como Town’s newest attraction, the Soaring Eagle Zip Line, lifts riders 85 feet above the ground for a fast-paced, panoramic view of the park you’ll never forget. If you’re a new Family Advantage member at Como Friends this summer, be sure to take advantage of one of the most exhilarating perks of membership—32 park points at Como Town.

As a committed Como Friends member, you already know the perks of supporting Minnesota’s most popular cultural attraction—behind-the-scenes news from the Como Insider and the Como Promo, advance access to special programs and preview events, a great discount at the gift shop, not to mention free or reduced admission at nearly 400 zoos and botanical gardens around the country.

Now’s the time to let your friends and family in on the secret by encouraging them to join Como Friends, too. You could even buy your friends new memberships as gifts. In fact, every new membership to Como Friends this summer will be matched dollar for dollar by a generous grant from the Katherine B. Andersen Fund of The Saint Paul Foundation. That means that every dollar you donate as a new member will go twice as far toward providing cutting-edge animal care, gorgeous gardens, and great education programs that teach more than 500,000 visitors each year how to be better stewards of the natural world. Help us grow the ranks of Como Friends’ valued members by passing this magazine to a friend and encouraging them to make a contribution in the enclosed envelope. You can also contribute online at www.comofriends.org today!
Save the Dates for ZooBoo: Five Nights of Fright-Free Family Fun

October 18, 19, 24, 25, & 26.

You don’t need a tuxedo to attend ZooBoo, but you will need tickets. All Como Friends’ members at the Family/Grandparent Level and above receive four complimentary tickets to this costumed, family-friendly benefit, but if you need more ZooBoo tickets for your brood you can buy them online beginning August 1 at our website, www.comofriends.org.

For more information about Como Friends’ longest-running fundraiser, watch your inbox for updates in our Como Promo, and look for additional coverage in the next issue of the Como Insider.

Legislative Update: Como Friends’ Advocacy Efforts Help Secure $5.4 million for Como Improvements

In May, the Minnesota Legislature approved $5.4 million in public bonding for Como Park Zoo and Conservatory toward a plan designed to calm traffic and streamline transit options around the regional park that welcomes more than 4 million guests every year. A $14.8 million bonding request toward renovating the WPA-era Seal Island and the Sparky Show amphitheater was not included in the final bonding bill passed in May.

“While we’re disappointed that Sparky’s new habitat wasn’t included in the bonding bill in 2014, we’re very proud of the work we did making the case for improving traffic in and around Como,” says Jackie Sticha, president of Como Friends. “With four million annual visitors to the regional park, lawmakers recognize that Como is a critical regional asset well worth the investment of public funding.”

Keeping pace with best practice standards for marine mammal care continues to be a priority at Como Zoo, which has cared for seals and sea lions for nearly 60 years. “Sparky is such a big part of the Como tradition, teaching conservation to generations of kids, and so we remain very committed to improving the exhibit in a way that will benefit the animals and visitors in the years ahead,” Sticha says.

To stay up-to-date on Como projects at the Capitol “like” us on Facebook and follow @ComoFriends on Twitter.
If you love animals, Como is the perfect place to volunteer. Going behind the scenes made me appreciate so many things I wouldn’t have known as a visitor—I guess that’s when I got hooked.

-Sherry Fonseth-Lais
Visitors will be able to get closer to Como Zoo’s journey of giraffes thanks to a new face-lift now underway in the African hoofstock building.

When she arrived on the scene last fall, Rosie the reticulated giraffe became the 18th healthy offspring born from Como Zoo’s gentle herd of giraffes. Over the last three decades, in fact, Como Zoo has built one of North America’s most successful giraffe breeding programs. But for Rosie’s wild cousins, the odds of survival are slimming.

“Most people are aware that elephants are endangered, with around 500,000 animals in the wild,” says Como Zoo hoofstock keeper Todd Maki. “There are far fewer giraffes in the wild—somewhere around 80,000 total. With the reticulated giraffe, like the ones we have here at Como, there are about 4,700 left in the wild.” Visitors accustomed to
seeing giraffes at Como Zoo may not realize the conservation challenges these fascinating African mammals face—a public relations problem that Como Zoo aims to fix with a fresh new facelift now underway in the African Hoofstock Building.

As warm weather has moved Como Zoo’s giraffe, zebra, kudu and ostrich outdoors, the campus is remodeling the interior exhibit to welcome additional African reptile and amphibian species into a more naturalistic environment. The current “veterinary clinic” look will be remade with fresh new murals, naturalistic textures, and interpretive displays that make the connection between Como Zoo’s hoofstock and their cousins in the wild. “We want to improve the experience for visitors and for the animals, creating more opportunities for enrichment and connection for animals and people,” says Como Campus Director Michelle Furrer. “We’re even working on the smell-o-vision factor, trying to maintain the feel that you’re up close to the animals, but making it a little less pungent.”

Preserving those up-close experiences for visitors is important to Como’s conservation mission. In fact, research suggests that making connections with individual animals helps foster empathy and encourage life-long curiosity about the natural world. That’s why the exterior remodeling effort, slated for fall of 2014, also includes plans for a new public feeding station for the giraffes that will allow zookeepers and interpretive volunteers to interact directly with giraffes, sharing more about the natural behaviors and adaptations of the world’s tallest land mammal.

“With the new public training programs in Polar Bear Odyssey and Gorilla Forest, Como visitors are getting incredible glimpses into animal behavior every day, and we’re really looking forward to building those same conservation connections with our giraffes,” says Como Friends President Jackie Sticha.

Bringing visitors closer to Como Zoo’s giraffes is part of the design of a new face-lift to the African Hoofstock building.

The interior habitats will be updated with more naturalistic features (opposite page), while the outdoor exhibit will include a new feeding station (bottom-right) to give the public more face-to-fur encounters.

Visit our new giraffe giving kiosk and take a peek at the progress of the project (bottom-left).
“Our understanding of animal behavior has expanded considerably since the African Hoofstock Building opened in the 1980s, and this improvement will allow Como to showcase the great behind-the-scenes care our giraffes and other African animals get every day,” says Sticha.

Contributions to Como Friends helped to get the $658,000 hoofstock remodel off the ground, providing the funding for the interior facelift underway this summer. Public funding secured through the Minnesota Arts and Cultural Legacy Fund will provide about $230,000 of the project, while private contributions leveraged through Como Friends will cover the remaining cost. For instance, the Cities 97 Sampler project awarded a $10,000 grant toward the public feeding station, an improvement that would not be possible without community support.

“Private contributions make the difference in pushing exhibits from being ‘pretty good’ to ‘very progressive,’” says Sticha. “The improvements we’ve enjoyed at Como over the last decade have been driven by this community support, so Como Friends’ supporters should feel very proud of what their investments are making possible.”

“Cool Cats” may be the theme for this season’s Travelers Sunset Affair, but tigers and lions won’t be the only animals to benefit from Como Friends’ annual summer gala.

“When guests make a fund-a-need contribution at Travelers Sunset Affair, they’re helping to pay for everything from the $30 worth of romaine lettuce our animals chew through every day, to the cost of creating education programs that reach more than half a million visitors,” says Caroline Mehlhop, Como Friends’ Director of Sponsorships and Events.

While the annual summer gala sold out in June, Como Friends fans can still take part in the year’s biggest fundraiser by making a fund-a-need contribution that will support Como’s highest-priority projects.

In 2014, those projects include a fresh new facelift for Como Zoo’s African Hoofstock Building, and ground-breaking for the Centennial Garden, which will be a focal point for celebrating the Marjorie McNeely Conservatory’s 100-year-anniversary in 2015.

“Como is able to do a lot with a little,” says Mehlhop, noting that Como manages to welcome nearly two million visitors a year for just under $4 per person. “That’s why contributions of any size really make a difference at Como.” For instance, $75 can cover the lion’s share of the chicken drumsies Como Zoo’s large cats eat every week, while $100 is what it takes to feed three growing gorilla bachelors in Gorilla Forest every day.

If you’d like to be part of Como Friends’ biggest funding push of the year, send a contribution marked Fund-a-Need in the enclosed envelope today, or visit us online at www.comofriends.org

THANK YOU!
Frederick Nussbaumer, the German-born landscape designer whose green thumb first shaped Como Park, believed public gardens were more than mere attractions—he saw his work as a community service.

“An ideal public park,” Nussbaumer wrote in a 1902 essay, had an obligation to “provide objects of attractiveness in horticultural display—especially in the high northern latitudes, where on account of the long, bleak winters, the floral decorations in the public parks excite special admiration during the short summer season.”

Though plenty has changed in the century since the City of St. Paul first broke ground on the Conservatory in 1914, Minnesotans’ need for greenery has never waned. “It’s one of many alluring charms of Como,” says Horticultural Curator Tina Dombrowski. “Fulfillment of our intrinsic affiliation with the plant world continues to draw generations of visitors to this enduring botanical landmark in the heart of Minnesota.”

Creating a refined, accessible landscape is one of the goals for the Centennial Garden, which will provide a versatile plaza for social gatherings and special events.

Colorful “carpet beds” of blooming annuals were a favorite feature at Como in its early decades.
As the Marjorie McNeely Conservatory prepares to celebrate its centennial in 2015, Como’s horticultural staff will break ground on the Centennial Garden, a new exterior landscape designed to connect Como’s past to its future. “At the turn of the century, Como’s landscape gardens were incredibly popular regional attractions, and our goal is to reflect a little of that history with a formal garden that can serve as the focal point for observing the Conservatory’s 100-year anniversary,” says Como Campus Director Michelle Furrer.

The plans call for a 4,000-square-foot garden to be sited in the space between the Visitor Center “porch” and the Sunken Garden wing. Designed in the manner of a formal garden room, the space will feature flexible seating that can serve as both a gathering place for visitors and a venue for private or public events. Site preparation will begin in mid-August, ensuring that the garden will be in full bloom for next season’s celebrations.

Your support for Como Friends is essential to creating the $350,000 Centennial Garden, nearly half of which will be funded through gifts from private donors. Como Friends’ advocacy efforts at the Capitol last year also helped sow the seeds for success, helping to leverage $184,000 of the project’s costs through the state’s Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund.

“The Centennial Garden and the facelift of the African Hoofstock Building are our two fundraising priorities at Como Friends this year, and they both really resonate with our supporters,” says Como Friends President Jackie Sticha. “Contributing to the construction of The Centennial Garden is a great way to honor Como’s history while investing...
Make the most of Minnesota’s growing season with a fresh crop of tools, guidebooks and garden accessories now available at Garden Safari Gifts. Light up your garden path with a Japanese lantern or decorate a tiny fairy garden with whimsical miniatures. We’re also stocked with t-shirts and plush, perfect for Como lovers of all sizes.

Remember, members receive 15 percent off every gift purchase, with proceeds that go toward great improvements such as the Centennial Garden coming in 2015!
Receiving duplicate mailings?
Please help us to reduce mailing costs and paper.
If you receive more than one issue of the Como Insider, call our office at (651) 487-8229.

Please Recycle

Pack for Panama with Como Friends
March 14-22, 2015
Cost: $4,995 per person, not including airfare
Join Como Friends in March 2014 for an unforgettable nine-day tour of the tropical rainforests and world heritage sites of Panama. Created in partnership with our friends at Schulke Travel and International Expeditions, our itinerary will immerse you in the amazing flora and fauna of this Caribbean wonder, with excursions led by expert naturalists.

To register for an upcoming Panama travel information session, e-mail Jennifer.Downham@comofriends.org.